

THE ROLE OF HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS IN SATISFYING THE READING NEEDS OF RESIDENTS WITH PRINT LIMITATIONS

Supplement to Volume 3

From the series "A Survey to Determine the Extent of the Eligible User Population Not Currently Being Served or Not Aware of the Programs of the Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped," Volumes 1-5.

Prepared for the National Library Service.

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**AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
NEW YORK 1979**

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Research Volumes in This Series:

- Volume 1 - Executive Summary—Reading with Print Limitations
- Volume 2 - Characteristics, Activities and Needs of People with Limitations in Reading Print
- Volume 3 - The Role of Health Care Institutions in Satisfying the Reading Needs of Residents with Print Limitations
- Volume 4 - Current Issues in Library Services for People with Limitations in Reading Print
- Volume 5 - Design and Execution of a Study of Reading with Print Limitations

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The Individual and Institutional Context

Rocky Garnett is a student in the state's school for visually impaired. He is epileptic and legally blind. He has been a boarding student at the state school for nearly ten years; he was one of the earlier legally blind students admitted in this state.

His Activities and Daily Life

Rocky is a senior and has many plans for his future. He has applied for college work in a health technology field. Recently the school has developed a program whereby blind students participate in public schooling and are offered work opportunities in the community. These programs are important to him. In fact, Rocky says that he hopes that in the future there won't be a need for separate schools for the blind, handicapped or deaf-blind--at least not requiring one "grow up in them."

Special Reading

Talking Books make Rocky chortle. He comments on the dilemma of both the low vision and totally blind students. "The teachers don't want us to use them for school books...even if I listened, I wouldn't pick up spelling and might miss pronunciation. The house parents (of the dormitories) like them. After dinner, we're supposed to read or listen to tapes for an hour or so. But then, that would mostly be leisure reading". They play them a lot, he says, because they have to. Some of the blind kids really like the reading aloud. Especially when they're new or one is into a certain type of book...but, at a certain age, says Rocky, Talking Books are no longer private. "We keep the doors open. If someone wants to read Gone With The Wind, everyone knows. If you reread a passage everyone knows!" "We're exposed to them, but they have their place. We don't want to be dependent on them for important things. Like me, I should try to read what I can, exercise my eyes. The kids who follow braille should be practicing that."

Rocky believes that Talking Books are more essential as one gets into high school, because many book are not available in braille.

Rocky notes that the school has its own library but that most of the students speak directly with the Regional Librarians by the time they're in fourth or fifth grade and order their own material. Now they can call almost anytime they think of something they need because messages can be left on a recording. He points out that

PROFILES OF INSTITUTIONAL RESIDENTS: #34
MR. JOHN GRIBBON

The Individual and Institutional Context

Mr. Gribbon--who asked to be called John--has had cerebral palsy for some time (he's not sure how long). He is in the minority in this nursing home which serves predominantly old people. Yet, he affiliates primarily with staff, many of whom have taken special interest in him.

John can only move one elbow; he has no control over his hands. His head lolls against the backrest of his wheelchair. Communication using words is difficult; yet, he can be understood readily and his points are often made tersely and with much humor. He has no control over his legs and spends prolonged hours on a special mattress or strapped into his wheelchair.

His Activities and Daily Life

John's bedroom is a private world; he has personally directed its decoration and it appears much like a den or studio apartment. He has displayed his interests in cars (including a collection of models), travel, and sex. He has a stereo with a collection of over a hundred cassettes, mostly music.

He rarely leaves this room but comments that sometimes visitors are so frequent that he can hardly finish an interesting book.

Special Reading

John is an avid user of Talking Books. He began using the program shortly after the law was passed enabling handicapped people to have access to machines--because a family member had read a notice about it in a newspaper.

He has both a cassette and record player, but is more likely to use the cassette because it is longer playing and requires less frequent staff assistance. Staff put the cassettes on the machine and he uses his call light (he has a toggle switch he can negotiate attached to his wheelchair) to signal the completion of a tape.

He often discusses a book with the staff such as Roots.

He is reticent to suggest any improvements because, he says, the program means so much to him he would not want anyone to think it had such serious problems it should be stopped. He does have some difficulty obtaining special requests (best sellers or books specific to his hobbies). It is a problem to find staff with time to call the library and often the library does not have the material he wants for many months.

He would like to use the machine on his own. He has been thinking about this for some time, but hasn't yet figured out how he could handle the precision of movement necessary to turn a tape.

Gribbon, p. 2

Key Words

Handicapped reader/Nursing Home
Machine Design
Assisted Use

The Individual and Institutional Context

Mr. James May is sixty. He is currently in a Veterans' Home but has only been there for about two years. Before that, he spent six years in a home for the blind. He has diabetic retinopathy; he lost his sight and ability to be particularly active about nine years ago. He comments sadly that the disease also caused him to lose his job early and contact with his family (because of the nursing home care and costs). He is a double amputee.

His Activities and Daily Life

James May is a survivor. He says his life has "turned around" for the better since coming to this military home, because here he "is somebody." He has a full CB radio operation in his nursing home bedroom and regularly communicates with truckers in the community; he is well known to those in the area. (Calls were frequent during our time together.)

He spends much of his day in the private room. He waited a time to have a room to himself because he didn't want to disturb anyone with all of his equipment.

Special Reading

He has been a Talking Book user since he lived in the nursing home for the blind. He learned about it "from the old people as much as from the staff." He has both a cassette player and record player as well as his own cassette player (because the sound is better and it is easier to work). He wishes that the flexible discs had more carefully drilled out holes, that he could get a catalog on time, and that he could get more than 3 of the average 25 selections he makes each month. He says if his machine is not used daily, it is because he has nothing to read, and that that happens about one week a month.

He used to have a volunteer to help him "keep on the library" but he hasn't seen the volunteer and doesn't know what happened to him or her. Now staff try to help him, but nobody seems really sure what to do to get what he needs.

May, p. 2

Key Words

Possessor/User
Problems in Use
Volunteers
Equipment/Materials

PROFILES OF INSTITUTIONAL RESIDENTS: #36
MRS. ETHEL OPAL

The Individual and Institutional Context

Mrs. Opal is 84; she has been blind for about fifteen years, but began noticing severe changes in her vision during middle age. She is also in a wheelchair due to a recent stroke. She came to the nursing home six years ago.

Mrs. Opal was a prominent member of her community, formerly a teacher and heavily involved in volunteer activities. She has been an avid reader throughout her life and claims that if she were born today she would be running for political office.

Her Activities and Daily Life/Special Reading

Mrs. Opal spends all of her time in her bedroom listening to Talking Books; she can often finish two historic novels a day, sometimes listening for nearly ten hours. She occasionally changes her position, listening from her wheelchair in the morning and shifting to her bed for a few hours in the afternoon. She originally was in a shared bedroom, but was able to move to a private room because of her listening. She listens with an earphone until her ears get tired, then "lets it blast." She has an older model record player and had not heard of the cassette players.

Her entire room is set-up around her machine, storage of books, and access to them. She keeps a detailed log of what she reads, writing with a fat pencil and using a writing guide. Occasionally she finds a volunteer who will refresh her memory on what she has read by re-reading her a page or two of notes per book. She is very worried about how a blind person will retain her memory, but shows little overt signs of anything other than alertness.

She subscribed as an individual before coming to the institution. As a heavy reader, she feels she gets special attention from the library and from the staff. She reads most anything; books, magazines, non-fiction, fiction, etc.

She does not participate in any activities of the home except church. She finds other people distracting because she cannot follow group activity. She does not communicate with the several other Talking Book readers in the home, but does speak with staff and family about what she is reading.

Comments

Very few institutional readers used the program with this vigor or fervor.

Key Words

Subscriber: Individual

Heavy Reader

Nursing Home

Memory: Desire to keep track of what is read.

The Individual and Institutional Context

Mrs. Safire's vision had been failing perceptibly within the past two years. She has good use of her hands and is mobile, but spends most of the day in a chair beside her bed. She is in her seventies and has been in this nursing home for about five years, when she could no longer care for a farm by herself.

Her Activities and Daily Life

Mrs. Safire is very distressed by not being able to read any longer. She feels anxious about news of her neighbors and nearby community, but can get no one to read her the paper.

She does not like the group activities of the nursing home. She says that they are for idle people who developed ways of filling their free-time. She was busy working and raising a family and had no time to learn crafts or handwork.

She used to read, particularly magazines about the home and with ideas for women like herself. She misses these magazines. She has not kept up with them since coming to the home, originally because no one subscribed but now also because she cannot see to read.

She is not happy and talks freely about all of the worries she has: poor health, no visitors, nothing to do.

Special Reading

Mrs. Safire did not know about Talking Books (there is a machine that is played as background to the activities programs--but she doesn't attend those). She doubts, however, that she would be interested. She has many reasons why she could not use the program: she cannot see and doesn't know how she would learn to operate a machine, she has no place for the machine (her stand and dresser are filled with personal objects from home which are important to her and a source of pride and discussion). She also believes the machines should be saved for the totally blind, and says that she can still see shadows and outlines and would not want anyone to think she was totally without sight.

Key Words

Not Aware
Reasons for Disinterest in Use
New Readers: Hesitation of
Vision Impaired

PROFILES OF INSTITUTIONAL RESIDENTS: #38
MRS. MAGGIE SMITH

The Individual

Mrs. Smith will be 99 this winter. Almost twenty years ago her vision began to fail; she became aware of it because of her family members' attentiveness to changes in her abilities. She is now very hard of hearing. Yet, if you can make yourself heard, conversation is possible. Her sense of humor is ribald and genuinely captivating.

Her Activities and Daily Life

Though in a wheelchair and moderately debilitated by arthritis in her hands, Mrs. Smith considers herself an active person. She has a winning personality and is taken by staff to be with other people. She finds ways of communicating despite her disabilities and spends much of her day lifting the spirits of others.

Special Reading

Mrs. Smith was introduced to Talking Books in a nursing home nearly as soon as her vision loss precluded her from reading print. She is a strong supporter of the value of the program and until her hearing impairments became severe last year she continued to read women's magazines and historic fiction. She says she is not sure whether she stopped using the program more because of the concentration (and energy) required to "stay with" the reader or because the sound seemed rasping, tinny and hard to interpret (which she feels is related to her general hearing loss).

She still has a machine assigned to her, but it is used for others in the facility. She would like to see other people take advantage of the program. "I had twenty years of meaning with Talking Books," she advised. "When I started it was a pretty new thing. But, I wasn't afraid to try because reading is very important, it always has been in my life."

Comments

Despite her present inability to hear well, her program advocacy was compelling. If only it had an outlet.

Key Words

Former User
Hearing Impaired
Attitudes toward NLS Services

Garnett, p. 2

getting to know the librarians can be an asset as one goes on in school and has special needs for material or braille.

Key Words

School for the Blind
Student
Braille
Regional Library Services
Talking Books vs. Braille

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